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REVIEW ARTICLES

A HABSBURG EMPEROR FOR THE NEXT CENTURY

Joseph II, II: Against the world, 1780–1790. By Derek Beales. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xix + 733. ISBN 978-0-521-32488-5. £80.00.

Enlightenment and reform in eighteenth-century Europe. By Derek Beales. London: I. B. Tauris, 2005. Pp. ix + 326. ISBN 978-1-86064-950-9. £18.99 paperback.

I

Statues provide one revealing index of historical memory, being a guide to the attention and importance conferred by subsequent generations upon figures in a nation's past. Visitors to present-day Vienna will find ample commemoration of important and not-so-important figures from Austrian Habsburg history, with the emperor Franz Joseph (1848–1916) and the empress Maria Theresa (1740–80) particularly well represented. The latter's son, Joseph II, however, is more elusive, commemorated primarily in an imposing equestrian statue modelled on that of Marcus Aurelius and erected – after some hesitation – by his nephew, the emperor Francis II (1792–1835), in 1806–7. It is located not in one of the city's imposing main thoroughfares, but in what came to be known as the 'Josefplatz', outside the Imperial Library. This relegation was appropriate, given what Professor Beales styles Joseph II's 'almost pathological dislike' for statues.¹ It also mirrors the emperor's popular and scholarly reputation in his native Austria and more widely in Europe. Though long accounted a leading 'enlightened despot', his reforming initiatives have usually been deemed unsuccessful and his proclaimed radicalism in inverse proportion to the success he enjoyed, his very name sometimes seeming a by-word for failure. The emperor's life and reign were disdained where they were not neglected, until the publication of the first volume of Derek Beales's biography two decades ago.² This surveyed Joseph's childhood and adolescence, and the fifteen years following his father Francis Stephen's death in 1765, during which he was both Holy Roman Emperor and Co-Regent in the Habsburg monarchy; its successor is devoted to the dramatic decade of personal rule which followed Maria Theresa's death late in 1780.

¹ Beales, *Joseph II*, II, p. 365.

² Derek Beales, *Joseph II, I: In the shadow of Maria Theresa, 1741–1780* (Cambridge, 1987): see the review article by Grete Klingenstein, 'Revisions of enlightened absolutism: "the Austrian monarchy is like no other"', *ante*, 33 (1990), pp. 155–67.

There was one towering exception to the general neglect: a massive and remarkable study of 'Joseph II, his political and cultural activity' by Paul von Mitrofanov, which appeared in a German translation in 1910: exactly a century ago.³ Its author was a young and obscure Russian scholar, and this was his first book. Written in the surprisingly short period of eight years and based primarily on foreign diplomatic reports from Vienna together with the ample printed material available, especially for its subject's decade of personal rule (1780–90), it was brilliantly written and has dominated the field ever since: in the introduction to the second and final volume of his own magisterial biography, Derek Beales wisely notes that 'Ever since it appeared, it has been true that only those historians who have read and rely on it can hope to write good books on the period' (p. 9). Mitrofanov's pioneering study was neither a conventional biography nor a chronological survey of the 1780s, but a series of linked essays on central aspects of Joseph II's personal rule, which collectively made up an illuminating and remarkably comprehensive introduction. Its author lived for only seven more years, working on an equally detailed study of Joseph's brother and successor, Leopold II, who reigned over the Habsburg lands from 1790 until 1792. This seems not to have been completed, though Mitrofanov, already seriously ill, published the first part of the first volume, dealing with Habsburg foreign policy in 1790–1. The fact that it appeared in Petrograd in 1916 ensured its neglect outside Russia, until Tim Blanning drew attention to its notable quality and real importance a decade ago.⁴

Despite – perhaps even because of? – the quality and comprehensiveness of Mitrofanov's book, the study of Joseph II and his reign has languished over the last century. This has been particularly striking in Austria, where the preference for his mother has been as strong among historians as among the raisers of statues – with a handful of important exceptions.⁵ A series of second-rate and often highly derivative biographies have appeared, frequently cool in tone if not actually hostile, sometimes seeking to enlist the emperor in a variety of dubious causes and seldom adding much to established historical knowledge. There are a handful of more specialized works: in recent decades the most notable have been Antal Szántay's pioneering investigation of regional policy in 1784–7 and the origins of the reign's final crisis, Michael Hochedlinger's detailed exploration of foreign policy during the Ottoman War, P. G. M. Dickson's massively researched articles on government and religious and financial policy during the 1780s,

³ Paul von Mitrofanov, *Joseph II., seine politische und kulturelle Tätigkeit* (2 vols., Vienna, 1910). It had originally been published in Russian three years earlier, in 1907. There is an admirable brief introduction to Mitrofanov (1873–1917) by T. C. W. Blanning, 'An old but new biography of Leopold II', in T. C. W. Blanning and David Cannadine, eds., *History and biography: essays in honour of Derek Beales* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 53–72.

⁴ Blanning, 'An old but new biography', *passim*.

⁵ See especially the important catalogue of an exhibition held at the great monastery of Melk in 1980, which was preceded by a series of short articles on the emperor's life and reign: *Österreich zur Zeit Kaiser Josephs II.: Mitregent Kaiserin Maria Theresias, Kaiser und Landesfürst* (Vienna, 1980). Two of the most interesting recent monographs have been studies of government: Waltraud Heindl, *Gehorsame Rebellen: Bürokratie und Beamte in Österreich, 1780–1848* (Vienna, 1991), and Renate Zedinger, *Die Verwaltung der Österreichischen Niederlande in Wien (1714–1795)* (Vienna, 2000).

building on his powerful earlier study of public finance under Maria Theresa which itself extends into Joseph II's reign, J. Karniel's notable study of the toleration granted to Protestants, Orthodox, and Jews in 1781–2, and Tim Blanning's short, incisive and characteristic lively examination of Joseph II and power, which finds the key to the emperor in a series of modernizing reforms.⁶

Significantly, four of these five scholars are based outside the present-day Republic of Austria and the so-called 'successor states': those territories which until the break up of the empire at the end of the First World War were ruled from Vienna, above all the Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian Republics. Those historians who are complete outsiders have shown a greater willingness to consider most and even all of the diverse Habsburg territories – exactly as Derek Beales does – rather than focus upon their own particular province or kingdom. It was the approach championed by the Oxford historian, R. J. W. Evans, in his seminal *The making of the Habsburg monarchy, 1550–1700* (Oxford, 1979), and it has been more widely influential outside the former Habsburg territories than within them: though once again there are signs that this may be changing.⁷

There is a sense, moreover, in which the direction of both Austrian and international scholarship has further reduced the attention given to the emperor. During the second half of the twentieth century, the most active area of research into eighteenth-century Habsburg history was a prolonged investigation of the origins – ideological and personal – of the notable religious and social reforms introduced between the 1760s and 1780s, which from around 1830 have gone by the name 'Josephism' (*Josephinismus*): a term which was initially intended in a derogatory sense, designating a degree of state control over the church which many orthodox Catholics found unacceptable, especially in an era when ultramontanist was reviving.⁸ While it could reasonably be thought that Joseph II might have some responsibility for policies bearing his name, that historical

⁶ Antal Szántay, *Regionalpolitik im alten Europa* (Budapest, 2005); Michael Hochedlinger, *Krise und Wiederherstellung: Österreichische Grossmachtpolitik zwischen Türkenkrieg und 'Zweiter Diplomatischer Revolution', 1787–1791* (Berlin, 2000); P. G. M. Dickson, 'Joseph II's Hungarian land survey', *English Historical Review*, 106 (1991), pp. 611–34; idem, 'Joseph II's reshaping of the Austrian church', *ante*, 36 (1993), pp. 89–114; idem, 'Monarchy and bureaucracy in late eighteenth-century Austria', *English Historical Review*, 110 (1995), pp. 323–67; idem, 'Count Karl von Zinzendorf's "New accountancy": the structure of Austrian government finance in peace and war, 1781–1791', *International History Review*, 29 (2007), pp. 22–56; idem, *Finance and government under Maria Theresa* (2 vols., Oxford, 1987); J. Karniel, *Die Toleranzpolitik Kaiser Josephs II.* (Gerlingen, 1986); T. C. W. Blanning, *Joseph II.* (London, 1994).

⁷ See especially Thomas Winkelbauer, *Österreichische Geschichte, 1522–1699: Ständefreiheit und Fürstenmacht – Länder und Untertanen des Hauses Habsburg im Konfessionellen Zeitalter* (2 vols., Vienna, 2003); cf. R. J. W. Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs: essays on Central Europe, c. 1683–1867* (Oxford, 2006).

⁸ See the judicious account of these reforms, and the debates surrounding them, in Beales, *Joseph II*, 1, ch. 14. The major contributions to this debate were: E. Winter, *Der Josefinismus: Die Geschichte des österreichischen Reformkatholizismus, 1740–1848* (1943; 2nd edn, Berlin, 1962); F. Valjavec, *Josephinismus: zur geistigen Entwicklung österreicher im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (2nd edn, Munich, 1945); F. Maass, *Der Josephinismus: Quellen zu seiner Geschichte in Österreich, 1760–1850* (5 vols., Vienna, 1951–61); G. Klingenstein, *Staatsverwaltung und kirchliche Autorität im 18. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 1970); P. Hersche, *Der Spätjansenismus in Österreich* (Vienna, 1977); E. Kovács, ed., *Katholische Aufklärung und Josephinismus* (Vienna, 1979); and H. Kluebing, *Der Josephinismus* (Darmstadt, 1995).

responsibility was diluted by a whole series of efforts – sometimes more ingenious than convincing – to demonstrate that the long-serving chancellor, Wenzel-Anton von Kaunitz-Rietberg (1711–94), the empress Maria Theresa, and even some minor figures within the government were the principal authors of the initiatives. The corollary was that Joseph's legislation during the 1780s was seen as merely emulating or extending earlier measures, and so its originality was diminished: as it was by most of the contributors to the large-scale conference held in Vienna in 1980 to debate the whole topic.⁹ Two decades ago, the most distinguished eighteenth-century Austrian historian of her generation and one of the organizers of the 1980 conference, Grete Klingenstein, summed up the scholarly consensus by declaring that 'Historians today agree that continuity, not caesura is the hallmark of Joseph's reign as sole ruler from 1780 to 1790.'¹⁰

An important chapter in Derek Beales's first volume together with a subsequent and notably trenchant article, first published in German and now reprinted in English, rightly returned Joseph to centre stage in the study of the measures bearing his name, and his completed biography proves that he is absolutely correct to do so.¹¹ The second volume also makes a compelling case for the radicalism as well as the novelty of many of the policies during the personal rule. The relative neglect of the 1780s and the paucity of reliable secondary studies, however, has forced the author to conduct much of his own primary research. The majority of the essays now brought together in *Enlightenment and reform in eighteenth-century Europe* were written since the biography's first volume appeared in 1987 and represent important stages in the author's intellectual progress towards its completion, giving the collection an unusual interest and coherence; some of these articles will be referred to subsequently.

The emperor's decade of complete personal authority, extending from his mother's death on 29 November 1780 until his own demise on 20 February 1790, presents several further problems. The first is the mountainous scale of material produced at the time. During the final decade of Maria Theresa's reign the average number of edicts annually for the Austrian and Bohemian territories was slightly less than 100; for her son's personal rule, measured as the complete calendar years 1781–9, the comparable figure was 690: almost seven times that total. In Hungary the increase in administrative activity was even more striking, reflecting its importance within Joseph's plans. The Council of Lieutenancy, the main agency through which the kingdom was governed, had been receiving around 10,000 instructions annually during Maria Theresa's reign. This figure rose under Joseph II, at first slowly and then much more rapidly as a more

⁹ Richard Georg Plaschka and Grete Klingenstein, eds., *Österreich im Europa der Aufklärung: Kontinuität und Zäsur zur Zeit Maria Theresias und Josephs II.* (2 vols., Vienna, 1985).

¹⁰ Klingenstein, 'Revisions of enlightened absolutism', p. 163.

¹¹ Beales, *Joseph II*, 1, ch. 14; 'Joseph II and Josephism', in Beales, *Enlightenment and reform*, pp. 287–308.

interventionist policy was adopted: to 17,000 (1783), then to almost 30,000 (1784), more than 40,000 (1785), and finally 54,000 (1786): more than five times the figure during the previous decade.¹² Secondly, the remodelling and significant relaxation of the censorship in June 1781, coupled with the enormous controversy which many of the emperor's measures aroused, produced a flood of publications – mainly pamphlets – of all kinds, as government policy was attacked and then defended in what would now be styled the 'public sphere'.¹³ The radicalism of censorship reform was clear to contemporaries: the number of prohibited publications declined by over 80 per cent during the decade (p. 94).

All these sources have to be read and digested by any biographer, who must also cope with his subject's restless energy, apparent in the dramatic increase in the number of official decrees, and by the fact that Habsburg government was conducted very largely on paper, with innumerable officials being required to submit formal memoranda. An additional problem is the highly personal nature of Joseph II's policies and the less detailed discussion between ruler and ministers evident during the 1780s, which can obscure the emperor's motivation. To this must be added the geographical extent and complex nature of the Habsburg patrimony. No other ruler was involved at so many points on the map of Europe. This dynastic patchwork sprawled through central Europe with the established core territories – the Austrian Archduchy, the Lands of the Bohemian Crown and the kingdom of Hungary together with Transylvania – and two recent acquisitions: Galicia, annexed from Poland-Lithuania in the first partition (1772), and the Bukovina, seized from the Ottoman empire three years later. The principal outlying possessions were the northern Italian duchy of Milan and the distant Austrian Netherlands, which included Luxembourg. There was also a supervisory power, and some legal authority, over the *Reich*: the Holy Roman Empire of which Joseph II had been head since 1765 and where, additionally, there were some small Habsburg territorial enclaves.

These territories were ruled through a series of different titles, and consisted of a myriad of separate political societies, each with its own distinctive characteristics. Joseph II's omnivorous travelling while he was co-regent (1765–80), fully set out in the first volume, gave him a far better and also more direct knowledge of his lands, not merely than any other Habsburg ruler but also of his own ministers and advisers.¹⁴ Significantly, he decreed during the personal rule that officials must have travelled through, and served as, administrators in the provinces for which they were responsible. His own travelling did not cease after 1780, though it was reduced in scale: the emperor was to be absent from Vienna for almost one quarter of the decade, journeying to the Austrian Netherlands, (briefly) to France,

¹² Beales, *Joseph II*, II, pp. 5, 372. These figures all derive from Professor Dickson's careful calculations: *Finance and government*, I, pp. 318–19; idem, 'Monarchy and bureaucracy', p. 353.

¹³ There is a notable study by Leslie Bodi, *Tauwetter in Wien: Zur Prosa der österreichischen Aufklärung, 1781–1795* (Frankfurt am Main, 1977). Censorship reform was broached for the first time within a week of Maria Theresa's death: Beales, *Joseph II*, II, p. 90.

¹⁴ Beales, *Joseph II*, I, chs. 8, 11, and 12, and the striking map on pp. 244–5.

to the Italian peninsula, and to Russia, as well as campaigning in 1788 during the Ottoman war. His biographer has been equally energetic, working on archival materials from no fewer than twenty-two separate repositories scattered across the length and breadth of the present-day countries contained within the eighteenth-century Habsburg monarchy and also far beyond its frontiers: important and often highly original materials have been gathered from Rome, Turin, Venice, London, Berlin, and Moscow. Derek Beales possesses an enviable capacity to smoke out important new manuscript sources, such as the despatches of the papal nuncio Garampi, the journal of the monk Malingié, and the private correspondence of the Liechtenstein and Kaunitz sisters, who were the most important members of Joseph's private society, the so-called *Dames*.

The obstacles to any study of Joseph II have been set out at such length in order to make clear the immense scale of Professor Beales's achievement, which is both historiographical and historical. When the mountain of printed material is added, the extent of the task he has accomplished becomes apparent. Rather than censuring the author for taking twenty years over his second volume, he merits our admiration and gratitude for completing it so rapidly. His first publication specifically devoted to Joseph II was a sensational article demonstrating that many familiar quotations employed to buttress the argument that the emperor was an enlightened reformer – above all the famous ‘Since I have ascended the throne, and wear the first diadem in the world, I have made philosophy the legislator of my empire’ – were in fact forgeries.¹⁵ The critical and questioning intelligence evident in this initial article has never flagged. Derek Beales has sustained his interest and sympathetic understanding over more than half a scholarly lifetime in a way that is deeply impressive and commands admiration. There is no sign here of the kind of growing ambivalence of biographer towards his subject about which Hugh Brogan has recently hinted so revealingly.¹⁶ The second volume is certainly notably more critical of the emperor than its predecessor, but that is simply because there is so much more to criticize in the attitudes and actions of the impetuous sole ruler.

Professor Beales's ability to reconsider his own earlier interpretation in the light of new material and further research, both by other scholars and by himself, is as impressive as it is unusual. The best example is the emphasis throughout the second volume, on the importance that the emperor accorded to petitions drawn up or presented orally by his subjects and the amount of time he devoted to dealing with such gravamina, both in Vienna and on his travels.¹⁷ This went unnoticed in the first volume, but is integral to the author's interpretation of the

¹⁵ Beales, ‘The false Joseph II’, *ante*, 18 (1975), pp. 467–95, reprinted in a revised and expanded version in Beales, *Enlightenment and reform*, pp. 117–54.

¹⁶ Hugh Brogan, *Alexis de Tocqueville: prophet of democracy in the age of revolution – a biography* (London, 2006), p. 692.

¹⁷ See his ‘Joseph II, petitions and the public sphere’, in H. Scott and B. Simms, eds., *Cultures of power in Europe during the long eighteenth century* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 249–68; cf. Beales, *Joseph II*, II, pp. 143–50, 681, and *passim*.

personal rule. Joseph II regarded such petitions and the enquiries these generated as a valuable way of checking up on his officials and on the workings of government, as well as an essential dimension of his own duties as sovereign.

II

One central problem, strengthened by half a century of concern with the origins of Josephism, has been the precise significance of the beginning of Joseph II's personal rule at the end of November 1780. To this Derek Beales offers a nuanced and persuasive answer. Paradoxically, he first emphasizes the significant continuities from Maria Theresa's reign in a crucially important section on the structure and personnel of government, placed so near the start of a long book that an unwary reader might miss it (pp. 25–40 *passim*). The new ruler's strident criticisms of ministers and officials during the 1760s and 1770s makes the very limited changes after his own accession very surprising. Though firm evidence for this does not exist, Beales persuasively suggests (p. 32) that the dying Maria Theresa extracted promises from both her son and her leading minister, Kaunitz, whose relationship had periodically been stormy before 1780, that the chancellor would remain in office, which he duly did until two years after Joseph's death. Threats of resignation by the first minister had been a recurring feature of the Co-regency, but, despite a clear downgrading of his position and reduction of his influence after 1780, Kaunitz was careful not to threaten to leave office under Joseph II, though he was now over seventy.¹⁸ One additional explanation to those offered here (pp. 34, 107) – that the emperor needed the chancellor's unique experience in foreign policy and a statesman of his rank to hold the reins of government during his continuing travels, and that Kaunitz for his part believed that the sovereign should be obeyed – may be that the chancellor feared his resignation actually might be accepted, for he was avid for power and prepared to make real concessions to retain it. During the 1780s Kaunitz was to be far less powerful than during the second half of Maria Theresa's reign, as his impact upon domestic policy and even his input into Austrian diplomacy declined.¹⁹ Yet his experience and unique standing always gave the veteran chancellor potential influence over the impetuous ruler, and he emerges from Beales's second volume as a more important figure during the personal reign than hitherto believed.

The same continuity was evident where other advisers were concerned, exactly as had been the case in 1740 when his mother succeeded. One consequence was that most of Joseph II's ministers were up to a generation older than the ruler: the only two who were not were the Cobenzl cousins: Philipp, born in the same year as the emperor (1741) and Ludwig, twelve years younger. Even Karl von

¹⁸ There is a lively account of developments before 1780: 'Love and the empire: Maria Theresa and her co-regents', in Beales, *Enlightenment and reform*, pp. 182–206.

¹⁹ Professor Franz A.J. Szabo, whose pioneering *Kaunitz and enlightened absolutism, 1753–1780* (Cambridge, 1994) did so much to rescue the chancellor's career under Maria Theresa from obscurity, is at work on an eagerly anticipated sequel which will examine the final phase of his life.

Zinzendorf, the one real ministerial newcomer during the 1780s, brought in to shake up the financial administration, was four years Joseph's senior. All the other leading advisers were significantly older. Kollowrat had been born in 1727, Lacy in 1725, Rosenberg in 1723, Hatzfeld in 1718, Kaunitz in 1711, and Hadik as long ago as 1710 (p. 31). This contributed to Joseph's sense of isolation, personal as much as political, which emerges very clearly from the second volume.

The continuities extended far beyond a handful of leading ministers. Though it lacked executive authority and had at most a co-ordinating function, the council of state (*Staatsrat*) set up at Kaunitz's behest in 1760–1 and dominated by his *protégés* had played an influential and even dominant role in internal policy before 1780. Joseph's determination to dictate policy, clear from the first day of his personal rule, could only with difficulty be reconciled with a continuing role for the *Staatsrat*, yet the institution and its personnel – if not its influence in policy-making – survived the change of ruler. Indeed, the 'degree of administrative continuity [was] surprising' (p. 30), especially in view of Joseph's strictures on people and structures before 1780 and his disdain for the nobility, from whose ranks most high officials were drawn: no fewer than twenty-eight out of ninety-eight councillors of state (*Hofräte*) in post at his accession were still in office when he died.

Contrary to a widely held but erroneous belief, relatively few councillors were dismissed during his reign and those who lost their posts were often victims of the extensive administrative reorganization driven through by the emperor. One explanation for this was the established Habsburg custom of 'clemency': ministers and officials were retained until they were too old to perform their duties and sometimes even when they manifestly had become incapacitated. In a more fundamental way, however, the extent of continuity in government indicated Joseph's very hierarchical view of rulership: he demanded obedience, not initiative, from his civil servants and was relatively unconcerned over the actual membership of the central departments, expecting officials to obey orders. Even more remarkably, he continued to promote bureaucrats on the established basis of seniority, rather than on merit, which some of his views might have led contemporaries to expect. The dysfunctional nature of government, which resulted from the ensuing collision between the emperor's expectations and the realities of administrative continuity, inertia, inefficiency, and even opposition, especially at the local level, is a recurring theme throughout the whole book.

The first half of the second volume is dominated by the 'avalanche' (p. 99) of legislation, primarily in the religious field, introduced between Joseph's accession and the middle of the decade. His exclusion from much initiative and certainly from any real authority in domestic policy, even during the final years of Maria Theresa's reign, had predictable repercussions when he secured power in his own right. The new ruler's responsibility for the measures now introduced at a helter-skelter rate is made clear beyond any doubt. While some continuities were evident, above all in the area of legal reform where the important measures introduced built on preparatory work undertaken under Maria Theresa, Joseph

II's reforming initiatives were, overall, clearly innovative. The most important were the remarkable expansion of religious freedom introduced in 1781–2, the attack on the monasteries which followed and the diversion of part of their revenues to parochial work and to education, and the host of initiatives reforming liturgy and ceremonial driven through for the capital Vienna, individually of limited importance but collectively representing a decisive break with Counter-Reformation Catholicism.

The question of toleration, where Joseph's actions are rightly styled 'revolutionary' (p. 169), once again highlights the question of continuity from the previous reign, evident over Josephism. The diversity of lands and peoples was also apparent in its religious pluralism. Greek Orthodox and Protestant groups, in the latter case usually secret communities, were to be found, while there were significant numbers of Jews, particularly after the annexation in 1772 of Galicia, which contained sizeable Jewish communities. Yet the monarchy's political and religious culture since the seventeenth-century Counter-Reformation had been firmly and intolerantly Catholic and, legally, religious minorities had no right to exist, whatever the situation in practice. The gulf between mother and son was wider over this issue than any other, as Beales demonstrates. During the later 1770s the open appearance of Protestantism in Moravia had forced the question of toleration on to the agenda in Vienna's corridors of power, where several leading figures, above all Kaunitz and Joseph himself, favoured an amelioration of the position of such minorities. Maria Theresa, however, was equally firmly opposed to any relief being given to heretics, and retained sufficient authority to force the publication in 1778 of a little-noticed Patent, which confirmed the disabilities attached to all non-Catholic groups within Habsburg territories and affirmed the very close identification with the Counter-Reformation.

Her policy was completely reversed by Joseph shortly after his own accession. By the autumn of 1781 – less than a year after he became ruler – the emperor had declared his intention to grant relief to his non-Catholic subjects. A series of measures introduced during the next year dealt with one province after another: the Habsburg monarchy's diversity was reflected in the individual measures which took provincial variations into account, thereby swelling the volume of legislation and increasing the historian's task. These granted non-Catholic congregations – for the first time – a legal right to exist and to practise their faith: Beales rightly concludes, in an important verdict, that these were 'by far the most generous concessions yet made to other religions in any Roman Catholic country' (p. 193). As he also notes, Joseph's measures gave Protestants greater legal freedom within the Habsburg monarchy than Roman Catholics enjoyed in the eighteenth-century British state (p. 658).

Their impact seems clear: by 1788 the *Staatsrat* believed that there were no fewer than 156,000 declared Protestants in the central and western territories. Though aware of the economic and social benefits of this toleration, the emperor's approach was primarily religious: he believed that one faith should not prevent another from worshipping according to its own lights and in its own location. Yet his

handling of toleration also revealed one crucial shortcoming of Joseph as a reformer, which was to be characteristic of the entire personal rule. The measures of 1781–2 were not preceded by any preparation, far less an extended one. The new ruler simply announced his intention, and then set about implementing his will. The real problems encountered, clear to ministers and officials, only became apparent after their introduction, and this limited success. The emperor was actually capable of listening and responding to advice from those better informed – one of the many fresh insights of these pages – and over religious reform he modified his policy in the light of suggestions from F. R. Ritter von Heinke, the acknowledged expert within the government. But he did so at a very late stage, after the details could not easily be changed, in a way which was to become typical.

One distinctive strength of Derek Beales's discussion of 'toleration' is his appreciation of the different potential meanings of the word itself. In a similar way he insists that Jews did not receive 'toleration' but that the emperor's aim – only partially realized – was that of advancing Jewish 'assimilation' and breaking down the social, cultural, and educational barriers which separated Jews from Christians. This was to be achieved by removing some of the restrictions under which Jewish communities lived in the Habsburg lands. He brings out the limitations of the relief measures introduced and rightly points out that, overall, Jews gained far less than their Protestant or Orthodox counterparts and were in fact still excluded from several Habsburg provinces. The purely domestic reasons behind the initiative are persuasively emphasized, rather than the foreign policy considerations highlighted by Karniel. While acknowledging that Joseph was aware of the economic benefits to his territories, Beales emphasizes that his primary motive was to advance social integration and religious freedom. The author's clear-sightedness and cool-headedness over what remains a very delicate issue may actually lead him to underestimate – rather against his own intention? – the real moral courage Joseph demonstrated in forcing through a degree of Jewish relief, against a background of sustained and at times vehement popular anti-Semitism, facilitated as it was by the relaxation of the censorship at the very outset of the reign. Unlike most *ancien régime* rulers, the emperor was actually prepared to tackle the status of Jewish communities through legislation, rather than provide tacit toleration in return for contributions to the state treasury by better-off Jews.

The unpopularity of toleration was one reason why Joseph II's reign was so mired in contemporary controversy. Another was the wide-ranging suppression of the monastic foundations which were so prominent throughout the Habsburg territories. Here Derek Beales has one special advantage, which distinguishes him from the overwhelming majority of eighteenth-century historians. He understands the real and continuing importance of religion, and writes about it with special authority.²⁰ His chapters on monastic reform and its consequences are

²⁰ See especially his notable survey of 'Religion and culture', in T. C. W. Blanning, ed., *The eighteenth century: Europe, 1688–1815* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 131–77.

among the most important in the entire book. They have their origin in a significant article, now republished in *Enlightenment and reform*, and in his pioneering study of the survival of European monasticism which appeared several years ago.²¹ These provide a secure foundation for his examination of the campaign against the monasteries.

One crucial problem has always been to establish reliable figures, in order to assess the scale of the suppression. It is now clear (p. 292) that more than 700 foundations were closed down and over 5,000 monks became secular priests. This second figure is the key to the whole enterprise. The emperor was no Henry VIII: this was not a spoliation to fill the coffers of the state, a raid upon monastic revenues by a rapacious monarch, but a sustained and quite deliberate attempt to improve parish provision and to redirect a proportion of monastic revenues, which could be considerable, to the improvement of Christian ministry and also to the provision of education, which had been seriously affected by the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773. Joseph's aims emerge particularly clearly from a highly original section on the kingdom of Hungary (pp. 298–302). There the scale of suppression was greater and it was the wealthiest Houses which were targeted, exactly because religious provision was far lower in a country where the Catholic Church was still a missionary church because of the long Ottoman occupation and the slow reconquest beginning around 1700. By 1790 monastic revenue in Hungary had been reduced by around one half, in comparison to the figure of one third elsewhere in the Habsburg lands.

Yet Beales's cool verdict – amply justified by his careful discussion – may surprise readers unfamiliar with his earlier studies: that while the suppression had considerable positive consequences, the emperor's 'policy turned out to be less drastic in result than intention' (p. 296). Indeed, Joseph clearly restrained more radical figures among his officials, above all the anticlerical Joseph Eybel, and thereby limited the seizures from monastic endowments. Over half of all monasteries survived, suffering a greater or lesser reduction in their revenues, while only slightly more than a third were actually closed down. Lay education was improved along with parochial and, to a much smaller extent, charitable provision, especially in and near to towns, and many former monks fashioned new careers as parish clergy and schoolteachers, but much remained to be done. Behind this offensive lay Joseph's zeal for a simpler, purer church, a return to that of the early fathers: attitudes which reveal him to be motivated, as the author emphasizes, by the ideas of Catholic Reform and particularly by the teachings of Lodovico Antonio Muratori, the noted Italian reformer.

Identical aims also emerge from the extraordinary series of minor reforms first introduced in Vienna itself, in liturgy and the forms of religious observance – the major initiatives are listed on pp. 320–1 – which included the secularization of

²¹ 'Joseph II and the monasteries of Austria and Hungary', in Beales, *Enlightenment and reform*, pp. 227–55; Derek Beales, *Prosperity and plunder: European Catholic monasteries in the age of revolution, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 2003).

marriage and the notorious changes to burial practice, involving the re-using of coffins. These measures, Beales persuasively argues, amounted to a ‘truly remarkable usurpation of ecclesiastical authority’ (p. 320), and underline both Joseph’s own dominant personal role and his claims to be viewed as a very radical reformer indeed in the context of the later eighteenth century. Measures such as these also do much to explain the emperor’s growing unpopularity, and criticism of and even resistance to his various measures, facilitated by the censorship reforms, assume increasing importance as the book progresses: exactly as it did at the time.

III

The second half is dominated by the origins and development of the ‘desperate crisis of Joseph II’s last years’ (p. 298). This had two dimensions, external and regional/provincial, which merged from summer 1787 onwards, during the emperor’s trip to the Crimea to meet Catherine II, Potemkin, and the itinerant Russian court, and eventually undermined some cherished initiatives. Here a shift of emphasis is evident in Derek Beales’s assessment of his subject’s approach to and handling of foreign policy. One important revelation of the first volume, was that before 1780 Joseph was not consistently bellicose, as his detractors had claimed both at the time and since, but was often less belligerent and expansionist than Kaunitz, above all during the first Russo-Ottoman War (1768–74), and he would again be more moderate during its successor, that of 1787–92. Yet the emperor’s diplomatic inexperience and also his lack of steadiness under pressure had been demonstrated by the War of the Bavarian Succession (1778–9), when Maria Theresa and her leading minister had to pull Joseph’s chestnuts out of the fire.²²

The detailed and authoritative account of foreign policy which runs through the second volume (chapters 3, 11, 16, and 17) makes clear that Joseph II’s shortcomings were even greater during the personal reign, when his direct control was all but complete, and his handling of Austrian foreign and military policy was of course heavily criticized by contemporaries. The one major achievement was the signature of the crucial alliance with Russia in spring 1781. The emperor’s personal contribution was overwhelming. Kaunitz doubted whether such an agreement could be concluded, though he had long believed that Austria could go on to the offensive in Germany against Prussia and in the south-east against the Ottoman Empire, only in alliance with a state which was now the leading power throughout the Continent’s eastern half. Its signature, which deprived Frederick the Great of his all-important Russian alliance and condemned Prussia to isolation, was the result of Joseph’s energetic personal diplomacy both before and immediately after Maria Theresa’s death. His two journeys to Russia were crucial to success: as were Potemkin’s eclipse of Nikita Panin, the architect of the

²² Beales, *Joseph II*, 1, chs. 9, 13.

Prussian alliance, at the Russian court, and Russia's move towards a more adventurous policy directed towards expansion south at Ottoman expense.

This alignment, however, did not bring the anticipated benefits, as Derek Beales's account makes painfully clear. In different ways both Joseph and Kaunitz hoped that it might yield territorial gains, to provide compensation for the decisive loss of Silesia to Prussia two decades before, and even facilitate an aggressive war against it following the death of the elderly but still formidable Frederick the Great, but neither aim was realistic. Joseph's personal direction of Vienna's diplomacy caused real and lasting damage. His efforts to bully the Dutch Republic into accepting a re-opening of the river Scheldt and so revive the economic prosperity of the Austrian Netherlands, were a humiliating failure, and the emperor's inexperience and misjudgements emerge very clearly from Beales's account. The second attempt to annex Bavaria, which would have rounded out the Austrian Archduchy in the west, was an even more serious setback than the first. In the mid-1780s, Joseph's efforts to carry out an exchange by which the present ruler would be granted a royal title and transplanted to the southern Netherlands, while Vienna annexed the Bavarian electorate, were wrecked by his own hesitation and by the significant international opposition which emerged, skilfully orchestrated by the ageing Prussian king. Within the *Reich* there was already considerable suspicion of Joseph's territorial and political ambitions, rooted in his conduct before 1780, and, after the breakdown of the exchange project, these anxieties fostered the creation of the 'League of Princes' (*Fürstenbund*) which further weakened Austrian influence.

The chapters on foreign policy provide a fresh and valuable perspective on a story which is already familiar, at least in outline. By contrast the gripping account of the mounting internal and regional crisis, and the emperor's stubborn and eventually disastrous response, are more original, and must have been researched and substantially written before the publication of Antal Szántay's recent monograph, though his conclusions are fully incorporated.²³ Its roots lay in Joseph's determination to force through a uniform administrative system for the entire monarchy, in complete defiance of its intrinsic nature, and in the opposition which this provoked, strengthened as it was by the resentment aroused by his religious and agrarian legislation. His policies, his biographer contends, were shaped by 'a fanatical cult of the impersonal unified state' (p. 1). In its pursuit, the emperor was willing to ride rough-shod over traditional constitutional conventions and practices, and to ignore established political frameworks, such as the *Joyeuse Entrée* which had long been the basis of Belgian government.

This approach caused particular problems in the kingdom of Hungary, to which some of the most illuminating sections are devoted. One important argument running throughout the second volume is that the various theoretical statements of principle produced by Joseph during the pre-1780 period, and in particular the so-called *Réveries* drawn up in 1763, influenced and may even have

²³ Szántay, *Regionalpolitik im Alten Europa*.

shaped his actions during the personal rule.²⁴ In the case of Hungary, the young Joseph had written that it would be essential not to reveal his aims. After 1780, however, his actions increasingly spoke louder than any words could do. The removal from Pressburg to Vienna of the historic Holy Crown of St Stephen – symbol of Hungarian Christianity and independence – ended the fiction that the ruler had any intention of being crowned king as all his Habsburg predecessors had been, while the diktat which followed soon after making German rather than Latin the language of the central administration and, with a delay of a year, of local government too, was equally resented. Joseph was determined to end Hungary's special status and to introduce reforms carried out elsewhere in the monarchy. The kingdom's exemption from military conscription would cease, its under-taxation – as the emperor believed – was to be ended, while the numerous petty nobles were to be made to bear direct taxation and to treat their serfs more humanely. Aims such as these, implemented by means of Joseph's increasingly despotic style of rule, inevitably aroused widespread resentment and, before long, outright resistance.

Though his plans to create a centralized and uniform state out of all his diverse territories also created opposition in Milan and the Tyrol, open resistance was greatest and also most serious in the Austrian Netherlands and in Hungary, where the emperor 'had virtually abandoned tact' (p. 368). In both instances Joseph II's own intransigence and miscalculation contributed directly to the crisis, as the detailed accounts in the final chapters make painfully clear. With the Ottoman War initially going badly, he not merely extended military recruitment into Hungary, but he picked this moment to introduce a whole series of controversial measures across the Habsburg lands: not merely did he continue to extend the unpopular religious changes initially introduced in Vienna, thereby alienating most traditional Catholics, but he pushed through long-prepared schemes of agrarian reform and extended measures of Jewish assimilation, both of which aroused significant opposition.

Personal peasant unfreedom (*Leibeigenschaft*) had been abolished in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia as long ago as November 1781, but the next stage of reform, which would impose direct taxation on the nobility and abolish serfdom, with some compensation for noblemen, required an extensive survey of landholding to be conducted, which was both time-consuming and controversial, particularly in Hungary.²⁵ In February 1789 – in the aftermath of a notably unsuccessful initial campaign in the Ottoman War – Joseph forced through a Tax and Serfdom *Patent* for the central lands and a separate measure for Galicia, both to come into operation in the following November. This completed the alienation of noble landowners in the central provinces. Bohemia's chancellor – himself a leading Bohemian magnate – Count Rudolf Chotek, who had some claim to be a personal friend of the emperor, delivered a withering critique and resigned his

²⁴ See 'Joseph II's *Réveries*', in Beales, *Enlightenment and reform*, pp. 157–82.

²⁵ Dickson, 'Joseph II's Hungarian land survey', is the essential guide.

office, but Joseph was uncomprehending and pressed on. In April he issued a Jewish *Patent* for Galicia, which was even more radical than the earlier measures, and subsequently extended its provisions to Lower Austria, Hungary, and Transylvania. It was remarkably liberal, advancing the social assimilation of Jews and removing many legal restrictions under which they had hitherto lived. But it was deeply controversial and had to be forced upon a reluctant officialdom at a time when opposition to the emperor's policies was reaching new levels, particularly from nobles throughout the Habsburg lands.

In the event, the reign's final crisis proved to be less acute than had seemed likely, partly due to Joseph II's belated and limited concessions and to the military victories won over the Ottoman empire in the 1789 campaign, which culminated in the capture of the key fortress of Belgrade. The Belgian revolt was a fiscal and financial blow: the territory was the source of a surplus and of important loans. But both in the Netherlands and in Hungary, Vienna's authority was restored by means of a mix of concessions and firmness. Though the author does not fully draw this conclusion, there are grounds for questioning whether the situation at Joseph's death was actually as serious as sometimes portrayed (e.g. pp. 609, 641–7).

The monarchy's powerful territorial nobilities occupy an ambiguous place in this volume: at one point Derek Beales explicitly declares that the emperor mishandled his relations with this important group (p. 43). Joseph's personal and political disdain for noblemen and noblewomen was undoubted, and one element in the final crisis of the reign was an offensive against both the magnates and the petty nobility in Hungary, seen as powerful obstacles to his aims. He sought – and failed – to abolish the *Fideikommiss*, the powerful system of entail which was one important basis of noble territorial power in large parts of the Habsburg monarchy. Disliking ceremony of all kinds and building on his own initiatives before 1780, he put the court into what amounted to deep-freeze, bringing it out of mothballs only for special visitors or on a handful of important occasions during the year: at other times, declared the prince de Ligne, it resembled either a monastery or a barracks (p. 132). Joseph went further and reduced ceremonial on all occasions, while he himself demonstrated an evident lack of respect for titles. In 1783 he closed the Noble Academy in Vienna. Four years later he went as far as to prohibit the established custom of kneeling before social superiors. Yet his ministers, most of his officials, and, strikingly, his own social circle comprised noblemen and noblewomen. Once again Joseph's theoretical radicalism was not fully translated into practice.

Etiquette was far from the only area where the nobility felt it had been forced on to the defensive. The emperor's agrarian reforms directly threatened its social dominance and economic prosperity. These same reforms, however, required the co-operation of noblemen if they were to be successfully implemented, while the majority of officials and all the important ministers were noblemen. Professor Beales is aware of this paradox, but – though comprehensive and well informed – his pages on serf reform are less illuminating than on the earlier

religious legislation. This may be because no equivalent controversy to that over Josephism has swirled around – and stimulated research upon – the emperor’s agrarian initiatives, where what is still in many ways the most comprehensive study of one key region was published as long ago as the 1890s.²⁶ Yet it is difficult to avoid the impression that Joseph’s biographer is actually less interested in agrarian reform and the associated fiscal measures than in the religious changes. One consequence is that there is far less about the Bohemian territories – arguably the heart of the eighteenth-century monarchy – in this volume than about Hungary, which receives detailed and illuminating treatment.

IV

A striking feature of the second volume is the reduced importance of the Holy Roman Empire, which is allotted one relatively short chapter (pp. 403–24), together with occasional passing mentions. At first sight this is surprising, since Joseph’s accession to full authority in 1780 united the Habsburg monarchy and the *Reich* for the first time since 1740 and conferred far greater power upon him than his mother had possessed. The political impact of this, however, was much less than might have been anticipated. As co-regent and emperor, the *Reich* had provided the young Joseph with one of the very few arenas where he could exercise initiative, but his efforts to do so had been met with both covert and open opposition and bureaucratic inertia, and had left him frustrated.²⁷ These earlier reverses do much to explain his indifference to imperial matters during the 1780s, when his agenda was in any case teeming. In 1784 his brother Leopold pronounced him ‘extremely annoyed and discontented’ (p. 403) with the *Reich*, where his own actions made matters worse. His efforts to exchange Bavaria for the Netherlands, reawakening as they did memories of his earlier aggression, and the *Fürstenbund* which this episode provoked, further weakened the Habsburgs within Germany and also hastened the *Reich*’s own decline. The emperor came to feel nothing less than ‘contempt’ (p. 447) for the body which he headed and which provided his own imperial crown.

A second rather unexpected emphasis is the amount of attention Joseph devoted to securing the Habsburg dynasty after his own death. In some ways he emerges from Professor Beales’s pages as a much more traditional sovereign than his reputation might suggest. Now childless and resolved never to re-marry, he determined from the very beginning of the personal reign that his younger brother Leopold, since 1765 ruling as grand duke of Tuscany, and his heirs would succeed him both in the Habsburg lands and in the *Reich*. To bring this about Joseph not merely forced through the ending of the *secundogeniture* status of

²⁶ K. Grünberg, *Die Bauernbefreiung und die Auflösung des gutsherrlich-bäuerlichen Verhältnisses in Böhmen, Mähren und Schlesien* (2 vols., Leipzig, 1893–4); he has also made good use of two important studies by R. Rozdolski (sometimes ‘Rosdolsky’): *Die grosse Steuer- und Agrarreform Josefs II.* (Warsaw, 1961); and *Untertanen und Staat in Galizien* (1962; German trans., Mainz, 1992).

²⁷ Beales, *Joseph II*, 1, ch. 5, outlines his policy before 1780.

Tuscany in 1784, effectively blackmailing Leopold to agree. His son – and Joseph's ultimate successor as emperor and ruler of the Habsburg lands – Francis was brought to Vienna in order that his uncle could supervise his upbringing, which he did with characteristic and detailed precision. Even more remarkably, Joseph devoted considerable energy and real tenacity over a period of years to arranging an old-style dynastic marriage for the young man, who was to marry Elisabeth of Württemberg, sister-in-law of the Russian Grand Duke Paul, and thereby strengthen Austria's fundamental alliance. Initially canvassed by the emperor early in the personal rule, it was only concluded in January 1788.

Leopold himself is the subject of a notably important reassessment. Derek Beales sub-titled his first volume, 'In the shadow of Maria Theresa', and one particular strength was its more realistic verdict upon Joseph's mother. The empress had been treated very favourably indeed by previous scholarship, which had seldom escaped from a romanticized view of her as the 'Mother of her Peoples'. By contrast Joseph's biographer provided the first important challenge to such hagiography, emphasizing side-by-side with her achievements and her undoubted devotion to her family and to the task of ruling, her bigotry, her unyieldingly traditional outlook, and her efforts to dominate her eldest son along with the emotional blackmail she routinely employed to get her own way. Exactly as Maria Theresa in her widow's weeds glowered from the reverse side of the dust-jacket of the first volume, Leopold in the midst of his numerous family appears on that of the second, which could equally well be sub-titled 'In the shadow of the Grand Duke Leopold'.

Beales's portrait of Joseph's successor, however, differs from that which has held sway among eighteenth-century historians since the mid-1960s. The two-volume biography then published by Adam Wandruszka did much to establish the picture of Leopold as a reforming, pacific, constitutional monarch, seemingly one of the most remarkable of the 'enlightened despots' whose rule in Tuscany (1765–90) exemplified the potential of modernizing reforms.²⁸ The grand duke's translation to central Europe on Joseph's death was to be brief – he died little more than two years later – but it was believed that he had played an important role in defusing the constitutional crisis created by his brother's policies, while his shrewd and pacific foreign policy supposedly extracted Austria from the perilous international situation which he inherited and which his predecessor had created. Indeed, some scholars effectively employ the younger brother as a stalking horse for tacit or explicit criticism of Joseph himself.

Professor Beales's study offers a cooler – and also much more realistic – portrait of Leopold, who emerges from his pages as a shifty, evasive, deceitful figure, much weaker and more hesitant than sometimes portrayed, anxious to escape any personal responsibility for actions taken in Vienna and engaging in

²⁸ Adam Wandruszka, *Leopold II*. (2 vols., Vienna, 1963–5). The brief second volume of this study, covering 1790–2, is not of the same notable quality as the first, which was devoted to Leopold's upbringing and to his rule in Tuscany.

correspondence in a notably critical vein with his sister, Marie Christine, behind their brother's back. Even more remarkably, he was guilty of leaking confidential papers (p. 564) and even conspiring against his own brother (p. 593): as Joseph was well aware. A characteristic of most *ancien régime* monarchies was tension between ruler and heir-apparent or between monarch and any surviving brothers (as at the court of Louis XVI in France). It was intensified by the tendency of those who were excluded from office to attach themselves to a potential successor in the hope of future preferment. In this case, however, it reached unusual levels. Beales uses the vast and remarkable *Relazione* which the grand duke compiled during his visit to Joseph in 1784 more skilfully and extensively than Wandruszka to demonstrate the extent to which he was a critic of his brother's policies, and provides an interesting and valuable counterpoint to his portrait of the emperor. Simultaneously Leopold's successes in foreign policy have been attributed to good luck rather than political wisdom, particularly by Michael Hochedlinger in his large-scale study of foreign policy during the Ottoman War.²⁹ The new emperor was to demonstrate less skill and to benefit from more good fortune in handling his problematic inheritance at home and abroad than previously believed. Hopefully these two studies will together launch the reassessment of Leopold both as grand duke and emperor which is so badly needed.

One value of Leopold's informed perspective as an insider is its emphasis upon the essential link between Joseph's personality and his policies. His biographer comments revealingly at one point that 'no one better deserves to be called a control freak' (p. 337), and his pages provide overwhelming evidence for such a verdict. One of the *Dames*, the much-put-upon Princess Eleonore Liechtenstein, declared that 'his hobby-horse is to be always right' (p. 23). Joseph could be cruel and unthinking in his handling of officials, while towards the end of the book Derek Beales refers with understandable exasperation to his 'usual self-dramatisation' (p. 635). A few months after his mother's death, the emperor had been overheard to say that 'it was difficult to be both liked and respected by one's servants' (p. 43), and his decade of personal authority was punctuated by a series of bruising clashes – such as that which led to Chotek's resignation – with senior officials and ministers, who resented not being consulted or, if they were, then being ignored. While he was prepared to listen to advice from those better informed about the detail and the problems of implementation of his reforming initiatives, he seldom if ever was willing to reverse a chosen policy once he had determined to implement it.

His stubbornness and refusal to compromise in the difficult final years of his reign are the object of some of Derek Beales's harshest criticisms, while Joseph's

²⁹ Hochedlinger, *Krise und Wiederherstellung*, especially part C, and more explicitly in the same author's 'Who's afraid of the French Revolution?: Austrian foreign policy and the European crisis, 1787–1797', *German History*, 21 (2003), pp. 293–319, especially pp. 299–300; see also Hochedlinger's *Austria's Wars of Emergence, 1683–1797* (London, 2003), pp. 392–6 and 402–7, and an important article by Matthew Z. Mayer, 'The price for Austrian security, part II: Leopold II, the Prussian threat and the Peace of Sistova, 1790–1791', *International History Review*, 26 (2004), pp. 473–514.

personal responsibility for the rebellions in the Austrian Netherlands and the near-revolt in Hungary by 1789–90 is made clear beyond any reasonable doubt. When confronted with the first Belgian revolt in 1787 Kaunitz, who was holding the fort in Vienna while Joseph was in the Crimea, made some judicious concessions with the aim of restoring Habsburg authority. The emperor's reaction bordered on the hysterical (pp. 518ff), and the episode further weakened the chancellor's position and influence. Yet if the emperor's personality largely explains his failures, it also made possible his successes, which were real, if less readily remembered.

The final balance sheet, after almost 1,200 pages of text across the two volumes, is surprisingly positive. Joseph II emerges as a more successful reformer than often believed, though in some ways less radical. His credentials as a leading 'enlightened despot' are powerfully affirmed, albeit one inspired, to an extent that was unusual, by the Catholic reformers and the Austrian and German cameralists rather than the *philosophes*. Here there is an imperceptible shift between the first volume, where the author appeared to be more persuaded of the emperor's openness to enlightened thought in general, and the second with its much clearer delimitation of the sources of his reforms.³⁰ Exactly where Joseph II fits into the wider European canon of enlightened reforms is left for others to explore, on the basis of the abundant material presented here. It is striking that the emperor's cadastral surveys and broadly physiocratic approach to fiscal problems resembled those of Calonne in contemporary France.

A powerful case is made for the importance and also the endurance of Joseph's religious measures, which – like many of his initiatives in Hungary – survived his death, along with many minor reforms. The extent of religious toleration and the considerable improvement in parochial provision and also in primary and even secondary education, were impressive achievements in the context of the later eighteenth century. So too were measures to improve health provision, above all the establishment of the General Hospital in Vienna. Joseph's sponsorship of theatre and, much more surprisingly, music also merits Derek Beales's plaudits, while what would later be styled the 'civil rights' of the Habsburg lands' inhabitants were notably extended by legal reforms during the 1780s, as subjects began to become citizens. A more patient ruler, his biographer concludes, would have achieved rather less. Yet the personal cost was enormous and would carry Joseph to his grave before he was fifty. The frenetic activity was accompanied by periodic nervous exhaustion (e.g. pp. 334–5) and by an almost complete breakdown of his health throughout the second half of the 1780s: the final chapters of the second volume present a powerful and strongly etched picture of the failing emperor driving himself towards his own private *Götterdämmerung*, as those around him distanced themselves from the dying monarch. The veteran chancellor, Kaunitz, with his renowned fear of illness and death, did not see the emperor at

³⁰ See also an important essay on 'Philosophical kingship and enlightened despotism', first published in Beales, *Enlightenment and reform*, pp. 28–59.

all in the final two years of his life, during which time they communicated only in writing, while Leopold lingered in Florence, only belatedly responding to his brother's increasingly emotional appeals to set out for Vienna.

Above all Derek Beales's two volumes are a triumphant vindication of the potential and utility of traditional biography, particularly of a figure of such importance, at a time when the value of the *genre* is once again being reasserted.³¹ Conceived on the grand scale and executed with great style and no little panache, they provide a detailed study of Joseph, his rule, and his times, which is likely to endure as long as Mitrofanov. Discriminating scholarship, acute psychological insight, a consistently questioning intellect which is never content with received wisdom or the easy answer, and elegant, spacious writing which can be waspish when it needs to be, combine to make this the finest political biography of an eighteenth-century ruler ever written. Its subject had no high regard for universities – one of several contemporary resonances in these pages – and regarded education as meaning primary and, less certainly, secondary schooling, which alone could foster basic literacy and numeracy, and so make his subjects more useful contributors to the common good which he wished to advance. On one occasion Joseph went so far as to declare that the publications of university professors were worthless, being 'now used only for wrapping cheese' (p. 310). Happily for all eighteenth-century historians and lovers of fine history, there is no danger of Derek Beales's remarkable biography suffering such a fate.

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³¹ See especially the 'AHR roundtable: historians and biography', *American Historical Review*, 114 (2009), pp. 573–661, and the special issue of the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 40 (2009–10), pp. 305–435, devoted to biography; cf. Professor Beales's earlier reflections in his inaugural lecture on 'History and biography' (1980), reprinted in Blanning and Cannadine, eds., *History and biography*, pp. 266–83.